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RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.

A

DISCOURSE,

ADDRESSED TO THE

FIRST UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY,

BRIGHTON, MASS.;

DELIVERED IN

7551.254

UNION HALL, SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 1859.

BY SUMNER ELLIS.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY BAZIN AND CHANDLER, OVER THE TRUMPET OFFICE, CORNHILL.

1859.

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"THEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN, BE YE STEADFAST, UNMOVABLE, ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD, FORASMUCH AS YE KNOW THAT YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN IN THE LORD." — 1 Corinthians xv. 58.

THE present discourse will partake somewhat of the character of history and of prophecy, of retrospect and forecast; to which will be added, the occasion seeming to demand it, somewhat of advice and exhortation.

The planting of a Christian Society is an event of no small importance, and deserves to be commemorated by some memorial more enduring than the casual emotions awakened at the hour, or the ever-diminishing traditions that may chance to fall upon the current of time. And as contributing, in some humble degree, toward such a memorial, I offer the present discourse.

The written history of Universalism, in Brighton, falls within a very recent and limited period — is to be found in the Record Book of a Society which is less than a twelvemonth old. Its unwritten history

extends further back by many years, and is limited, for the most part, to private families and individuals.

Some of these had connected themselves, wholly or partially, with the Universalist Societies of adjoining towns. But the inconvenience of so doing, must be apparent upon a moment's consideration. But this has not been the only, nor even the most considerable objection. In very many instances, there must have been necessarily a sacrifice of more or less, and, in the aggregate, of much, of the moral and religious instruction and influence dispensed from the Pulpits, the Conference rooms, and the Sunday Schools of the Churches where they have nominally attended, for, as is perfectly obvious, it is *presence*, not *absence*, that renders these attainable. And, moreover, there must have been a sacrifice of no small degree of that social intercourse and pleasure which come from dwelling in near vicinity and close neighborhood with the people sharing common sentiments and sympathies, and worshipping at the same Christian altars with us. Indeed, it is one of the chief beauties and benefits of a religious Society, that ever-agreeable and elevating social intimacy which should characterize it, the every-day interchange of friendly amenities and answering to heart to heart; but such a result, although eminently desirable, could not have been eminently realized by residents so distant from the Societies with which they had connected themselves as those of whom I speak.

Others of these families and individuals, not having the means of conveyance to and from the

churches of other towns, but desirous of recognizing the propriety and of realizing, so far as they might, the benefit of public worship, had united themselves with a religious Society with whose distinctive creed they had little, if any thing, in common, and from whose general exercises of devotion and moral exhortation alone they could expect to realize either pleasure or profit. With such a qualified fellowship and expectation, their attendance could scarcely have been otherwise than inconstant. Parents could not feel as if at their true spiritual home, the object of worship being so different from the One whom their spirits were wont to contemplate and commune with, and the view taken of human nature and human destiny being even less harmonious, if possible, with their own; nor could they scarcely desire that their children should feel otherwise than they felt themselves. And so, in their case, the best results of a religious institution could not have been realized.

Others of these families — and may I not include in this class quite a proportion? — confronted on the one hand, by distance, from uniting with Societies of their own faith, and on the other, by theological difference, from uniting with that which was less removed, have, for the most part, staid at home, — parents and children alike withdrawn from the public administration of religion, — their Sundays spent one way or another, with somewhat, perhaps, of reading, meditating, talking, walking, riding, — the calm sun, no doubt, often rising *upon* them in the east and setting *from* them in the west, without their thoughts

meanwhile being disposed into a spiritual frame or their souls led forth into the serene mount of devotion, whose ever-freshening and congenial atmosphere it were conducive to the soul's health and beauty to breathe as often as the Sabbaths recur, nay, and much oftener.

Such, on the whole, if I am correct in my information, has been the history of Universalism in Brighton, — a history not wholly agreeable to contemplate, as certainly it could not have been wholly agreeable to experience. Many and profound must have been the regrets, among parents especially, that circumstances were as they were; many and anxious the wishes that circumstances might be otherwise, at once for their own happiness and their children's good. And, prompted by such wishes, one or two, and I know not but more, unsuccessful attempts were made, to plant and foster a liberal Society. I call these attempts unsuccessful; I would not be mistaken in my meaning. They were so *only* outwardly and temporarily. They undoubtedly yielded, at the time, to the earnest souls connected with them, a rich meed of satisfaction, — may I not say, of delight, even? They served to confirm and deepen the sentiments out of which they grew — love of a universal faith and longing for a better opportunity to enjoy and inculcate it. They secured social attachments, and effected manifold memories, which are not effaced at the present hour, and will not be for many a year to come. And, moreover, they contributed more or less influence, without ques-

tion, to the origin of this last, and, as circumstances conspire to assure us, successful attempt to the same end, — an attempt whose origin I would not only commemorate, but whose progess in some degree promote, by the present discourse.

Hence, you see, in what qualified sense I refer to those former efforts as unsuccessful; they were so only as that human life is unsuccessful which, almost at the moment of entrance upon its responsible career, becoming, by some inevitable contingency, "perplexed, but not in despair, cast down but not destroyed," bravely arises in the might of a renewed strength, and with more deliberate and determined purpose, goes forth to achieve a noble victory, the pride of its manhood and the joy of its old age; or only as that young tree is unsuccessful which some adverse circumstance levels with the earth and ostensibly defeats, but whose roots, struck down into a good soil and hidden from view, shall one day spring forth and grow, by divine and human husbandry, into a stately tree, affording shade for the weary, and shelter for the storm-driven.

Thus runs the account up to the 7th of April, 1858, about one year since, when, to quote from your Society Record book, "a meeting was held . . . . . to consider the prospects and expediency of starting a Universalist Society in Brighton;" of which meeting it is further written, in the same connection, that it was "quite fully attended, there being nineteen gentlemen present." From that time a faithful record has been preserved, from which, and my own memo-

ry, I draw a few facts for the completion of this historical sketch.

Immediately pursuant to the preliminary meeting, already noticed, the "expediency" and "prospect" conspiring, as it was judged, steps were taken toward the commencement of public religious services: and on the Sabbath evening of the 18th of April, the first service was held, conducted by Rev. T. B. Thayer, of the Warren-street Church, Boston; and there have been held public services regularly from that date, conducted for some months, by transient supplies, and, for some months, by regular supply. At an early period, circumstances seeming to justify the course, a formal organization was effected by the adoption of a Constitution and By-Laws, and the choosing of a Board of Officers. A subscription was circulated to obtain means for carrying forward the new enterprise, now brought to public notice by public inauguration; to which were appended thirty-six names. This is the first list of names enrolled upon the pages of your Record book, and for this reason especially likely to be frequently read and referred to throughout your history. But I am confident the list will bear inspection and be ever regarded as a worthy one, for it indicates both generosity and fixedness of purpose. And all will concede it to be worthily headed, when informed that first in the column stands the name of one whose life, already advanced to its autumn, now bears, with a ripened faith in the goodness of the heavenly Father and in the final salvation of all the souls

which he hath created, that ripened respect and esteem of community, which are but the fit reward of a sincere heart and a generous hand. Richly may the dews of grace descend upon his remaining years — which heaven grant may not be few — and richly, also, upon all who with him, contributed to the planting of this new branch of the common vineyard of Christendom, and richly upon their families!

Waiving further recital of history, I invite your attention to other and more practical considerations; simply adding, by way of transition, that a past of increasing interest and gathering force, augurs a future of most certain and encouraging triumph.

I now propose, in the briefest manner I may be able, to set forth the conditions which will appear to afford a sufficient justification of the movement upon which you have entered. In a survey of the circumstances of the place and the people, I think is disclosed a demand even for something of the kind.

Within a quite extensive territory of increasing population and influence, destined, indeed, to become even numerously settled and widely influential, there is established but a single Society, which, as its founders intended, represents the idea and subserves the interest of Calvinism. I think I may correctly say it is as fully and decidedly given to the support and dissemination of that faith, as the general run of Societies with which it nominally ranks. Its doctrines of a triune God, of a fallen human nature,

and of a destiny of endless ill for a portion of mankind, are those current among the Trinitarians of our day — much toned down, indeed, from their ancient intensity, newly invested with a more modern phraseology, less authoritative in tone, but yet compatible with the convictions of another and numerous class found in every community anywise populous. Now, it can but appear quite obvious that something of religious opportunity and privilege, additional to what is now furnished, is demanded by the circumstances of the place and the people.

Looking at the matter simply from a worldly point of view, something additional is demanded. The present and prospective value of estates, whether in lands or houses, demands that there may be here a Church and Society, representing the idea and subserving the interests of liberal Christians, who are and are to be no inconsiderable portion of the residents in this as in every other place. For them there need to be furnished both an inducement and means of contentment, which, without some enterprize of this kind, are unfurnished, or furnished only upon conditions involving a degree of inconvenience to which many are unwilling to subject themselves. Cast your eyes over the wide area around you, now comparatively unoccupied, but certain, from its favorable contiguity to the great and growing metropolis of New England, to have its numerous streets, some day, and that not far distant, lined with commodious residences and fair homes, and an additional religious institution and oppor-

tunity can be seen to be a *desideratum* in a material point of view.

But, consider the matter upon another side. It is demanded by the social interest of the place and people, immediate and prospective, that another religious Society, uniting within it the liberal elements of the community, be established and sustained. There are social relations and influences, peculiar and elevating, involved in the intercourse and progress of a Society, united by a common religious faith and sentiment, which cannot be realized in any other way. Old and young are thus brought into an alliance which differs in its character and in its influence from the social alliances of any other kind; differs inasmuch as it is more than barely social, admitting, at the same time, and, in many cases, ostensibly recognizing, the presence of the religious element and influence, which elevates social intercourse above a merely social level. Alliances of a social nature, irrespective of religious differences, there should be, of course; and such there will be, both public and private, unless there exists a sectarianism as unjustifiable as injurious. Ah! yes, let there be the most kindly neighborly relations and intimacies without any reference whatever to creeds and convictions — heart answering to heart, affection reciprocating affection, love welcoming love! All such interchanges are both congenial and commendable. And shame upon the bigotry that cannot cultivate and enjoy them! Avaunt, false spirit of intolerance, which cannot admit of neigh-

borly intimacies and kindnesses! Be gone, thou descendant of an unchristian age! But be the social relations of this character never so pleasant, still independent of, and yet not incompatible with, these, there are social benefits dispensed within the limits of a well-ordered religious Society which are invaluable, — which supply, indeed, an otherwise unsupplied need. For, by mutual consent and natural concurrence, among the members of the same household of faith, in their social intercourse, thought is turned often upon religious themes, and conversation runs to a greater or less extent in the direction of moral and spiritual interests; and thus Christianity finds an opportunity to exert its influence outside the church and on other days than the Sabbath. It becomes domesticated at firesides, and gains a place amid social scenes, which enables it to impart its refining and beautifying spirit where otherwise it could not. And in addition to all this, there are, among the members of a religious Society, frequent social occasions of a somewhat formal nature, at which old and young, parents and children, assemble in common, where religion is directly and designedly recognized, and where, to no small degree, it determines the prevailing spirit animating the assembled company. In this direction, then, may be seen a demand for a Society, collecting within itself the liberal Christians of the vicinity.

But last and most of all is it demanded, that there may be here a place of worship, as within a convenient distance, where those may congregate in

company, from Sabbath to Sabbath, who believe in one God, the universal Father, and in all the doctrines rationally deducible from, and scripturally set forth in harmony with, this foremost article of faith, — among which doctrines, not to name others, may be included the subordination and moral office of Jesus; the impersonality of the Holy Spirit as the quickening and redeeming influence emanating from holiness, hence "without measure" from God, more limitedly yet abundantly from Christ, and in various degrees from men, in proportion to their possession of this celestial quality of character; the innocence of human *nature*, as contra-distinguished from human *character*, and as capable of becoming in the latter, either holy or sinful; the duty of unswerving obedience to the moral law, at once for obedience sake, and as a means of passing from the *natural* and morally indifferent state of innocence into that of positive holiness, as being the ultimate and best; and the destiny of *all souls*, sometime in the course of their existence, under the eternal government of God, to make that passage and thus arrive at that state or condition of being which is salvation, the attainment, subjectively and experimentally, and, hence, in the only true sense, of heaven. For the believers in such a theology, every day growing more numerous and powerful, there needs to be here a house of prayer and praise, a spiritual home, endeared to their hearts by cherished memories and increasing associations. And, moreover, for this class and their children, there needs to be here, as within a con-

venient distance, a Sunday School, or centre of instruction and training in these doctrines and principles, in the faith and practice of a religion, whose distinguishing characteristic is love — love, mutual and endless, between God and his children, and between souls as members of a common family and heirs of a common heaven. Sunday Schools, still comparatively novel instrumentalities for the inculcation of religious truth and development of religious character, although regarded, at first, with prejudice, receive, at the present time, as the brief experience of their utility warrants, the unanimous approbation of every Christian community; and it cannot escape the clear apprehension of all that, when perfected in their arrangements and facilities, they will contribute to a Christian education and influence among *all classes* — for old as well as young shall engage in their exercises and share their results — which have been, as yet, only partially realized. The existing deficiency in Christian knowledge and experience is destined to be obviated, and the best ideal of culture and character secured, more through Sunday School discipline, commenced early in life and continued to its very close, than through any other single agency. As a nursery of faith and piety, at the morning, the noon, and the evening of our mortal day, a most encouraging promise attends it; and no community, indeed, no sect in any community, when composed of any considerable number of families, should allow itself to neglect, or, even, indifferently support this institution. It merits positive interest and a hearty

patronage. And at your hands, believers in a common Father and in the salvation of all souls from sin and suffering through the power of Divine truth and love applied to the mind and heart, it claims a place in this immediate vicinity.

Such are some of the circumstances which adequately justify, which even demand the effort that has been made to plant a new Society in Brighton. They sufficiently establish the propriety, the wisdom, indeed, of the course you have taken; and should incite you to abide, nobly and devotedly, by the work so auspiciously commenced. Few Societies commence with the ability and the prospect which crown your starting. In the majority of instances, I should judge, they are more or less dependent, at first, and during their term of struggle between failure and success, upon foreign aid, either from Missionary treasuries, or private contributions; but, so far as I know, you have not solicited nor received a dollar from a distant source, nor have you hung in anxious suspense, for a single day, between extinction and existence. You are self-sustained, and sustained without the difficulty often encountered by Societies of more years and greater numbers. You have felt the need of a Society such as you have inaugurated, and, suiting the action to the feeling, have willingly and generously contributed to its support. And in speaking, as, in the remainder of this discourse, I intend mainly to do, of the conditions of your success as a new Society, I feel that I need do little else than enjoin a continuance of the worthy course you

have already pursued, — liberality in your contributions, faithfulness in your attendance, and union in your spirit and action.

I propose only to extend my remarks upon these three conditions of your prosperity; doing so in an order reversed from the above.

I hardly need say that *unity*, oneness of spirit and desire, a consenting together without discord and difference, a common concurrence and fellowship, must be cultivated and cherished with especial care and unintermitting constancy. How much there is depending upon this I cannot begin to delineate. I shall only attempt, with a few strokes of the pen, to trace some of its more obvious consequences.

Oneness in a religious Society, as in any other, affords a scene beautiful to contemplate. The element of harmony is one of the chief graces in all works of art, as painting, music, and poetry. In these it is recognized as all-essential to beauty. But can it be less essential to the beauty of a family-circle, or of a Christian Society? Concord is indispensable to the loveliness of either. Break the concord there into discord and division, and the spell is broken that charms and facinates whenever surveyed, and a scene falls under our view, from which the heart turns away. Break the concord there into discord and division, and beauty is exchanged for deformity.

But unity, moreover, is the source of joy, alike in a family or a Society. "How good and how *pleasant* it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," was the tender expression of David, his heart having been

often tried and distressed amid the strifes and hostilities of Israel's household of Faith! Alas! how many might adopt the same pathetic tribute to amity of intercourse and oneness of heart, for they are most truly "good and pleasant."

"How blest the sacred tie that binds
In union sweet according minds!
How glad the heavenly course they run,
Whose hearts, whose faith, whose hopes are one.

Together shall they seek the place
Where God reveals his cheering face:
How high, how strong their raptures swell
There's none but kindred souls can tell."

But I must here refer to unity, more especially as an indispensable condition of prosperity. Without it, large bodies may be weak, inefficient, unsuccessful; with it, small bodies may be both vigorous and prosperous. Without it, strangers are repelled; with it, they are attracted. Let it be said of any Society, it is the scene of habitual feuds and strifes, always disturbed by a war of difference and agitated by acrimony, and the uninitiated wisely prefer an outside and distant position; but, on the contrary, let the current report be that a Society is united, always on the best terms, all being peace and cordial goodwill within its limits, and admiration ripens into attraction, and distance is gladly exchanged for nearness, and non-membership for membership. Even so important to the gathering of strength, is the "unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;" nor is the importance thereof less with reference to the retaining of strength, for disunion always wastes and

scatters strength. "United we stand, divided we fall," is not more true of military ranks marching against opposing ranks, than of religious Societies striving for existence and secure standing against that opposition which sectarian opponents seldom fail of exerting, either covertly or openly, and that apprehension of failure among friends, which, so long as it exists, inclines them, if not to opposition, at least to inaction and non-co-operation, and striving, morever, among their own members for great moral and spiritual results. Behold in a simple symbol the lesson I would inculcate: Take a thousand twigs from any branching tree, and you may break them one by one, from first to last, with the utmost ease; unite fifty of them and they defy your power. "In union there is strength," in division there is only weakness. Aim, then, at union. Determine to be united. You may, nay, you will, in the natural course of events, be called upon to practice forbearance, tolerance, even forgiveness, in order to keep and conserve oneness of spirit, for among you as among all human beings, there will be diversity of thought, differences of judgment, unlike opinions; but strive to remember, with unfailing constancy, amid all your deliberations and decisions, that union of heart and purpose whose existence is indispensable to success.

The next condition of your prosperity to be noticed is, that of faithful attendance upon the public religious services of the Sabbath. I cannot speak of this in any other sense than a part of your *duty*, and

a part of no small moment, as you must see by a little reflection. First, you owe it as a favor to your preacher, whose pleasure and success in the services he attempts to perform, depend much, very much, upon the good attendance of the people; and whose discomfort and partial failure, upon their sparse attendance. One cannot realize the contrasted effects of a numerous and a scattering presence upon the preacher's spirit and animation, who has never actually experienced it. On the one hand, he is inspired; on the other, he is chilled;—in the former case, he is quickened and called out; in the latter, he is confronted. All preachers are of one mind and feeling in this respect; and it is a favor to them which congregations should not forget to evince, that of faithful attendance upon their public ministrations.

Again, you owe it to the company of worshippers at the same altar with yourselves, to be faithful in attendance. The pleasure and profit of a meeting are materially enhanced or diminished by a comparatively large or small attendance. And the reason of this must be obvious to any thinking mind. Public religious services, admitting of and properly enough subjected to some degree of modification in view of the number present, must still be conducted, whatever the number, with that formality and order of movement, at once required by the nature of the case and sanctioned by custom. They must be made with reference to a congregation, whether there be a congregation or only a few individuals in atten-

dance; the order and the attitude, assigned to the place and appropriate to the purpose, cannot be set aside, or exchanged, at will, for those of family or social worship. Hence, when but few are present, preacher and people alike feel embarrassed by a certain consciousness of unavoidable incongruity, inappropriateness, awkwardness. Who does not see, consequently, that members of a religious Society owe it to their fellow members, as well as to the preacher, to obviate as much as they possibly can, by their presence, that disagreeable experience to which they must otherwise be inevitably subjected. And, moreover, by faithful attendance there will be afforded to the fellow members of a Society, a more direct and positive help. One heart aids another; numbers engender influence; souls act and re-act upon each other; and there will be both more interest and influence realized by each as it worships and listens in company with many others.

Again, you owe it to the good of yourselves to be habitual attendants at church. If good influences are dispensed there,— and no one, I presume, doubts that there are — it can only be to those who are *present*, and not to those who are *absent*. And, moreover, a habitual attendance, in addition to putting you in the way of receiving good, by bringing you under its immediate influence, becomes in the end most truly pleasurable, something you come to feel you would not willingly forego, something which, so necessary does it become to you, you could not be deprived of without experiencing a deep sense

of loss. To the *constant* church-goer there accrue a profit and pleasure from attendance, which there cannot to one who frequents but occasionally, and hence with more or less reluctance, the Temple of worship.

Once more: you owe it to the success of the Society which you have newly established, to be constant at its public religious services. You can easily imagine what a contrast of impression and expectation there will be produced in community as your meetings shall be well or illy attended. In the one case, there will be given forth the impression and expectation that the movement will be crowned with certain triumph; in the other, that inevitable failure awaits it. And how differently must every stranger who comes to worship with you, be affected as he or she finds a goodly company together, whose evident devotedness inspires admiration, or a thinness of attendance which betrays but too apparently a want of interest and earnestness; on the one hand such an one will be favorably, on the other, unfavorably impressed.

I need not add further words with regard to the matter of attendance. I have addressed you in this respect in somewhat different terms from what I should a large and established congregation, for the reason that from various considerations it is a matter of pre-eminent importance in your case.

The last condition of your success as a new Society, I am to notice, is that of liberality and willingness in your benefactions for its support. From the

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example which you have already set in this respect, I conclude that I may dismiss this point with a few words. I will remark that you must expect and be ready, in this early stage of your existence, while your numbers shall be small compared with your expenses, to evince a more than ordinary liberality—a liberality, indeed, which may be really named generosity. The Pioneers in almost all new movements, the Patrons and promoters of nearly every fresh enterprise, and especially where the end proposed is the securing of increased facilities for the spread of Christianity and the advancement of civilization, must carry open hands as well as earnest souls; but their's may be the enviable consciousness that, beside procuring rich fruits for themselves, they are breaking the soil and planting the seed which shall yield their most abundant harvests to the generations which, in long succession, shall follow after them, and which, thus benefitted, shall cherish in grateful remembrance and arise to call blessed their benefactors. Motives thus immediate and far-reaching, addressing themselves to you in behalf of ample liberality, need but be stated to be realized and to exert their rightful influence.

I have now spoken, but too imperfectly I am aware, of your history, of the demands for your existence, and of your duties, as a new Society. Here I leave the matter for your consideration and action, adding, in conclusion, that while I can but regard you with anxiety as standing upon the threshold of a decisive failure or a decisive success, as

having crossed the Rubicon beyond which shall be encountered a long defeat or enjoyed a long triumph, still is that anxiety relieved by a firm confidence, gathered from a survey of your present and prospective conditions, that a sure progress and final achievement of visible and invisible prosperity await you.

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Some of these had connected themselves, wholly or partially, with the Universalist Societies of adjoining towns. But the inconvenience of so doing, must be apparent upon a moment's consideration. But this has not been the only, nor even the most considerable objection. In very many instances, there must have been necessarily a sacrifice of more or less, and, in the aggregate, of much, of the moral and religious instruction and influence dispensed from the Pulpits, the Conference rooms, and the Sunday Schools of the Churches where they have nominally attended, for, as is perfectly obvious, it is *presence*, not *absence*, that renders these attainable. And, moreover, there must have been a sacrifice of no small degree of that social intercourse and pleasure which come from dwelling in near vicinity and close neighborhood with the people sharing common sentiments and sympathies, and worshipping at the same Christian altars with us. Indeed, it is one of the chief beauties and benefits of a religious Society, that ever-agreeable and elevating social intimacy which should characterize it, the every-day interchange of friendly amenities and answering to heart to heart; but such a result, although eminently desirable, could not have been eminently realized by residents so distant from the Societies with which they had connected themselves as those of whom I speak.

Others of these families and individuals, not having the means of conveyance to and from the

churches of other towns, but desirous of recognizing the propriety and of realizing, so far as they might, the benefit of public worship, had united themselves with a religious Society with whose distinctive creed they had little, if any thing, in common, and from whose general exercises of devotion and moral exhortation alone they could expect to realize either pleasure or profit. With such a qualified fellowship and expectation, their attendance could scarcely have been otherwise than inconstant. Parents could not feel as if at their true spiritual home, the object of worship being so different from the One whom their spirits were wont to contemplate and commune with, and the view taken of human nature and human destiny being even less harmonious, if possible, with their own; nor could they scarcely desire that their children should feel otherwise than they felt themselves. And so, in their case, the best results of a religious institution could not have been realized.

Others of these families — and may I not include in this class quite a proportion? — confronted on the one hand, by distance, from uniting with Societies of their own faith, and on the other, by theological difference, from uniting with that which was less removed, have, for the most part, staid at home, — parents and children alike withdrawn from the public administration of religion, — their Sundays spent one way or another, with somewhat, perhaps, of reading, meditating, talking, walking, riding, — the calm sun, no doubt, often rising *upon* them in the east and setting *from* them in the west, without their thoughts

meanwhile being disposed into a spiritual frame or their souls led forth into the serene mount of devotion, whose ever-freshening and congenial atmosphere it were conducive to the soul's health and beauty to breathe as often as the Sabbaths recur, nay, and much oftener.

Such, on the whole, if I am correct in my information, has been the history of Universalism in Brighton, — a history not wholly agreeable to contemplate, as certainly it could not have been wholly agreeable to experience. Many and profound must have been the regrets, among parents especially, that circumstances were as they were; many and anxious the wishes that circumstances might be otherwise, at once for their own happiness and their children's good. And, prompted by such wishes, one or two, and I know not but more, unsuccessful attempts were made, to plant and foster a liberal Society. I call these attempts unsuccessful; I would not be mistaken in my meaning. They were so *only* outwardly and temporarily. They undoubtedly yielded, at the time, to the earnest souls connected with them, a rich meed of satisfaction, — may I not say, of delight, even? They served to confirm and deepen the sentiments out of which they grew — love of a universal faith and longing for a better opportunity to enjoy and inculcate it. They secured social attachments, and effected manifold memories, which are not effaced at the present hour, and will not be for many a year to come. And, moreover, they contributed more or less influence, without ques-

tion, to the origin of this last, and, as circumstances conspire to assure us, successful attempt to the same end, — an attempt whose origin I would not only commemorate, but whose progess in some degree promote, by the present discourse.

Hence, you see, in what qualified sense I refer to those former efforts as unsuccessful; they were so only as that human life is unsuccessful which, almost at the moment of entrance upon its responsible career, becoming, by some inevitable contingency, "perplexed, but not in despair, cast down but not destroyed," bravely arises in the might of a renewed strength, and with more deliberate and determined purpose, goes forth to achieve a noble victory, the pride of its manhood and the joy of its old age; or only as that young tree is unsuccessful which some adverse circumstance levels with the earth and ostensibly defeats, but whose roots, struck down into a good soil and hidden from view, shall one day spring forth and grow, by divine and human husbandry, into a stately tree, affording shade for the weary, and shelter for the storm-driven.

Thus runs the account up to the 7th of April, 1858, about one year since, when, to quote from your Society Record book, "a meeting was held . . . . . to consider the prospects and expediency of starting a Universalist Society in Brighton;" of which meeting it is further written, in the same connection, that it was "quite fully attended, there being nineteen gentlemen present." From that time a faithful record has been preserved, from which, and my own memo-

ry, I draw a few facts for the completion of this historical sketch.

Immediately pursuant to the preliminary meeting, already noticed, the "expediency" and "prospect" conspiring, as it was judged, steps were taken toward the commencement of public religious services: and on the Sabbath evening of the 18th of April, the first service was held, conducted by Rev. T. B. Thayer, of the Warren-street Church, Boston; and there have been held public services regularly from that date, conducted for some months, by transient supplies, and, for some months, by regular supply. At an early period, circumstances seeming to justify the course, a formal organization was effected by the adoption of a Constitution and By-Laws, and the choosing of a Board of Officers. A subscription was circulated to obtain means for carrying forward the new enterprise, now brought to public notice by public inauguration; to which were appended thirty-six names. This is the first list of names enrolled upon the pages of your Record book, and for this reason especially likely to be frequently read and referred to throughout your history. But I am confident the list will bear inspection and be ever regarded as a worthy one, for it indicates both generosity and fixedness of purpose. And all will concede it to be worthily headed, when informed that first in the column stands the name of one whose life, already advanced to its autumn, now bears, with a ripened faith in the goodness of the heavenly Father and in the final salvation of all the souls

which he hath created, that ripened respect and esteem of community, which are but the fit reward of a sincere heart and a generous hand. Richly may the dews of grace descend upon his remaining years — which heaven grant may not be few — and richly, also, upon all who with him, contributed to the planting of this new branch of the common vineyard of Christendom, and richly upon their families!

Waiving further recital of history, I invite your attention to other and more practical considerations; simply adding, by way of transition, that a past of increasing interest and gathering force, augurs a future of most certain and encouraging triumph.

I now propose, in the briefest manner I may be able, to set forth the conditions which will appear to afford a sufficient justification of the movement upon which you have entered. In a survey of the circumstances of the place and the people, I think is disclosed a demand even for something of the kind.

Within a quite extensive territory of increasing population and influence, destined, indeed, to become even numerously settled and widely influential, there is established but a single Society, which, as its founders intended, represents the idea and subserves the interest of Calvinism. I think I may correctly say it is as fully and decidedly given to the support and dissemination of that faith, as the general run of Societies with which it nominally ranks. Its doctrines of a triune God, of a fallen human nature,

and of a destiny of endless ill for a portion of mankind, are those current among the Trinitarians of our day — much toned down, indeed, from their ancient intensity, newly invested with a more modern phraseology, less authoritative in tone, but yet compatible with the convictions of another and numerous class found in every community anywise populous. Now, it can but appear quite obvious that something of religious opportunity and privilege, additional to what is now furnished, is demanded by the circumstances of the place and the people.

Looking at the matter simply from a worldly point of view, something additional is demanded. The present and prospective value of estates, whether in lands or houses, demands that there may be here a Church and Society, representing the idea and subserving the interests of liberal Christians, who are and are to be no inconsiderable portion of the residents in this as in every other place. For them there need to be furnished both an inducement and means of contentment, which, without some enterprize of this kind, are unfurnished, or furnished only upon conditions involving a degree of inconvenience to which many are unwilling to subject themselves. Cast your eyes over the wide area around you, now comparatively unoccupied, but certain, from its favorable contiguity to the great and growing metropolis of New England, to have its numerous streets, some day, and that not far distant, lined with commodious residences and fair homes, and an additional religious institution and oppor-

tunity can be seen to be a *desideratum* in a material point of view.

But, consider the matter upon another side. It is demanded by the social interest of the place and people, immediate and prospective, that another religious Society, uniting within it the liberal elements of the community, be established and sustained. There are social relations and influences, peculiar and elevating, involved in the intercourse and progress of a Society, united by a common religious faith and sentiment, which cannot be realized in any other way. Old and young are thus brought into an alliance which differs in its character and in its influence from the social alliances of any other kind; differs inasmuch as it is more than barely social, admitting, at the same time, and, in many cases, ostensibly recognizing, the presence of the religious element and influence, which elevates social intercourse above a merely social level. Alliances of a social nature, irrespective of religious differences, there should be, of course; and such there will be, both public and private, unless there exists a sectarianism as unjustifiable as injurious. Ah! yes, let there be the most kindly neighborly relations and intimacies without any reference whatever to creeds and convictions — heart answering to heart, affection reciprocating affection, love welcoming love! All such interchanges are both congenial and commendable. And shame upon the bigotry that cannot cultivate and enjoy them! Avaunt, false spirit of intolerance, which cannot admit of neigh-

borly intimacies and kindnesses! Be gone, thou descendant of an unchristian age! But be the social relations of this character never so pleasant, still independent of, and yet not incompatible with, these, there are social benefits dispensed within the limits of a well-ordered religious Society which are invaluable, — which supply, indeed, an otherwise unsupplied need. For, by mutual consent and natural concurrence, among the members of the same household of faith, in their social intercourse, thought is turned often upon religious themes, and conversation runs to a greater or less extent in the direction of moral and spiritual interests; and thus Christianity finds an opportunity to exert its influence outside the church and on other days than the Sabbath. It becomes domesticated at firesides, and gains a place amid social scenes, which enables it to impart its refining and beautifying spirit where otherwise it could not. And in addition to all this, there are, among the members of a religious Society, frequent social occasions of a somewhat formal nature, at which old and young, parents and children, assemble in common, where religion is directly and designedly recognized, and where, to no small degree, it determines the prevailing spirit animating the assembled company. In this direction, then, may be seen a demand for a Society, collecting within itself the liberal Christians of the vicinity.

But last and most of all is it demanded, that there may be here a place of worship, as within a convenient distance, where those may congregate in

company, from Sabbath to Sabbath, who believe in one God, the universal Father, and in all the doctrines rationally deducible from, and scripturally set forth in harmony with, this foremost article of faith, — among which doctrines, not to name others, may be included the subordination and moral office of Jesus; the impersonality of the Holy Spirit as the quickening and redeeming influence emanating from holiness, hence "without measure" from God, more limitedly yet abundantly from Christ, and in various degrees from men, in proportion to their possession of this celestial quality of character; the innocence of human *nature*, as contra-distinguished from human *character*, and as capable of becoming in the latter, either holy or sinful; the duty of unswerving obedience to the moral law, at once for obedience sake, and as a means of passing from the *natural* and morally indifferent state of innocence into that of positive holiness, as being the ultimate and best; and the destiny of *all souls*, sometime in the course of their existence, under the eternal government of God, to make that passage and thus arrive at that state or condition of being which is salvation, the attainment, subjectively and experimentally, and, hence, in the only true sense, of heaven. For the believers in such a theology, every day growing more numerous and powerful, there needs to be here a house of prayer and praise, a spiritual home, endeared to their hearts by cherished memories and increasing associations. And, moreover, for this class and their children, there needs to be here, as within a con-

venient distance, a Sunday School, or centre of instruction and training in these doctrines and principles, in the faith and practice of a religion, whose distinguishing characteristic is love — love, mutual and endless, between God and his children, and between souls as members of a common family and heirs of a common heaven. Sunday Schools, still comparatively novel instrumentalities for the inculcation of religious truth and development of religious character, although regarded, at first, with prejudice, receive, at the present time, as the brief experience of their utility warrants, the unanimous approbation of every Christian community; and it cannot escape the clear apprehension of all that, when perfected in their arrangements and facilities, they will contribute to a Christian education and influence among *all classes* — for old as well as young shall engage in their exercises and share their results — which have been, as yet, only partially realized. The existing deficiency in Christian knowledge and experience is destined to be obviated, and the best ideal of culture and character secured, more through Sunday School discipline, commenced early in life and continued to its very close, than through any other single agency. As a nursery of faith and piety, at the morning, the noon, and the evening of our mortal day, a most encouraging promise attends it; and no community, indeed, no sect in any community, when composed of any considerable number of families, should allow itself to neglect, or, even, indifferently support this institution. It merits positive interest and a hearty

patronage. And at your hands, believers in a common Father and in the salvation of all souls from sin and suffering through the power of Divine truth and love applied to the mind and heart, it claims a place in this immediate vicinity.

Such are some of the circumstances which adequately justify, which even demand the effort that has been made to plant a new Society in Brighton. They sufficiently establish the propriety, the wisdom, indeed, of the course you have taken; and should incite you to abide, nobly and devotedly, by the work so auspiciously commenced. Few Societies commence with the ability and the prospect which crown your starting. In the majority of instances, I should judge, they are more or less dependent, at first, and during their term of struggle between failure and success, upon foreign aid, either from Missionary treasuries, or private contributions; but, so far as I know, you have not solicited nor received a dollar from a distant source, nor have you hung in anxious suspense, for a single day, between extinction and existence. You are self-sustained, and sustained without the difficulty often encountered by Societies of more years and greater numbers. You have felt the need of a Society such as you have inaugurated, and, suiting the action to the feeling, have willingly and generously contributed to its support. And in speaking, as, in the remainder of this discourse, I intend mainly to do, of the conditions of your success as a new Society, I feel that I need do little else than enjoin a continuance of the worthy course you

have already pursued, — liberality in your contributions, faithfulness in your attendance, and union in your spirit and action.

I propose only to extend my remarks upon these three conditions of your prosperity; doing so in an order reversed from the above.

I hardly need say that *unity*, oneness of spirit and desire, a consenting together without discord and difference, a common concurrence and fellowship, must be cultivated and cherished with especial care and unintermitting constancy. How much there is depending upon this I cannot begin to delineate. I shall only attempt, with a few strokes of the pen, to trace some of its more obvious consequences.

Oneness in a religious Society, as in any other, affords a scene beautiful to contemplate. The element of harmony is one of the chief graces in all works of art, as painting, music, and poetry. In these it is recognized as all-essential to beauty. But can it be less essential to the beauty of a family-circle, or of a Christian Society? Concord is indispensable to the loveliness of either. Break the concord there into discord and division, and the spell is broken that charms and facinates whenever surveyed, and a scene falls under our view, from which the heart turns away. Break the concord there into discord and division, and beauty is exchanged for deformity.

But unity, moreover, is the source of joy, alike in a family or a Society. "How good and how *pleasant* it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," was the tender expression of David, his heart having been

often tried and distressed amid the strifes and hostilities of Israel's household of Faith! Alas! how many might adopt the same pathetic tribute to amity of intercourse and oneness of heart, for they are most truly "good and pleasant."

"How blest the sacred tie that binds
In union sweet according minds!
How glad the heavenly course they run,
Whose hearts, whose faith, whose hopes are one.

Together shall they seek the place
Where God reveals his cheering face:
How high, how strong their raptures swell
There's none but kindred souls can tell."

But I must here refer to unity, more especially as an indispensable condition of prosperity. Without it, large bodies may be weak, inefficient, unsuccessful; with it, small bodies may be both vigorous and prosperous. Without it, strangers are repelled; with it, they are attracted. Let it be said of any Society, it is the scene of habitual feuds and strifes, always disturbed by a war of difference and agitated by acrimony, and the uninitiated wisely prefer an outside and distant position; but, on the contrary, let the current report be that a Society is united, always on the best terms, all being peace and cordial goodwill within its limits, and admiration ripens into attraction, and distance is gladly exchanged for nearness, and non-membership for membership. Even so important to the gathering of strength, is the "unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;" nor is the importance thereof less with reference to the retaining of strength, for disunion always wastes and

scatters strength. "United we stand, divided we fall," is not more true of military ranks marching against opposing ranks, than of religious Societies striving for existence and secure standing against that opposition which sectarian opponents seldom fail of exerting, either covertly or openly, and that apprehension of failure among friends, which, so long as it exists, inclines them, if not to opposition, at least to inaction and non-co-operation, and striving, morever, among their own members for great moral and spiritual results. Behold in a simple symbol the lesson I would inculcate: Take a thousand twigs from any branching tree, and you may break them one by one, from first to last, with the utmost ease; unite fifty of them and they defy your power. "In union there is strength," in division there is only weakness. Aim, then, at union. Determine to be united. You may, nay, you will, in the natural course of events, be called upon to practice forbearance, tolerance, even forgiveness, in order to keep and conserve oneness of spirit, for among you as among all human beings, there will be diversity of thought, differences of judgment, unlike opinions; but strive to remember, with unfailing constancy, amid all your deliberations and decisions, that union of heart and purpose whose existence is indispensable to success.

The next condition of your prosperity to be noticed is, that of faithful attendance upon the public religious services of the Sabbath. I cannot speak of this in any other sense than a part of your *duty*, and

a part of no small moment, as you must see by a little reflection. First, you owe it as a favor to your preacher, whose pleasure and success in the services he attempts to perform, depend much, very much, upon the good attendance of the people; and whose discomfort and partial failure, upon their sparse attendance. One cannot realize the contrasted effects of a numerous and a scattering presence upon the preacher's spirit and animation, who has never actually experienced it. On the one hand, he is inspired; on the other, he is chilled;—in the former case, he is quickened and called out; in the latter, he is confronted. All preachers are of one mind and feeling in this respect; and it is a favor to them which congregations should not forget to evince, that of faithful attendance upon their public ministrations.

Again, you owe it to the company of worshippers at the same altar with yourselves, to be faithful in attendance. The pleasure and profit of a meeting are materially enhanced or diminished by a comparatively large or small attendance. And the reason of this must be obvious to any thinking mind. Public religious services, admitting of and properly enough subjected to some degree of modification in view of the number present, must still be conducted, whatever the number, with that formality and order of movement, at once required by the nature of the case and sanctioned by custom. They must be made with reference to a congregation, whether there be a congregation or only a few individuals in atten-

dance; the order and the attitude, assigned to the place and appropriate to the purpose, cannot be set aside, or exchanged, at will, for those of family or social worship. Hence, when but few are present, preacher and people alike feel embarrassed by a certain consciousness of unavoidable incongruity, inappropriateness, awkwardness. Who does not see, consequently, that members of a religious Society owe it to their fellow members, as well as to the preacher, to obviate as much as they possibly can, by their presence, that disagreeable experience to which they must otherwise be inevitably subjected. And, moreover, by faithful attendance there will be afforded to the fellow members of a Society, a more direct and positive help. One heart aids another; numbers engender influence; souls act and re-act upon each other; and there will be both more interest and influence realized by each as it worships and listens in company with many others.

Again, you owe it to the good of yourselves to be habitual attendants at church. If good influences are dispensed there,— and no one, I presume, doubts that there are — it can only be to those who are *present*, and not to those who are *absent*. And, moreover, a habitual attendance, in addition to putting you in the way of receiving good, by bringing you under its immediate influence, becomes in the end most truly pleasurable, something you come to feel you would not willingly forego, something which, so necessary does it become to you, you could not be deprived of without experiencing a deep sense

of loss. To the *constant* church-goer there accrue a profit and pleasure from attendance, which there cannot to one who frequents but occasionally, and hence with more or less reluctance, the Temple of worship.

Once more: you owe it to the success of the Society which you have newly established, to be constant at its public religious services. You can easily imagine what a contrast of impression and expectation there will be produced in community as your meetings shall be well or illy attended. In the one case, there will be given forth the impression and expectation that the movement will be crowned with certain triumph; in the other, that inevitable failure awaits it. And how differently must every stranger who comes to worship with you, be affected as he or she finds a goodly company together, whose evident devotedness inspires admiration, or a thinness of attendance which betrays but too apparently a want of interest and earnestness; on the one hand such an one will be favorably, on the other, unfavorably impressed.

I need not add further words with regard to the matter of attendance. I have addressed you in this respect in somewhat different terms from what I should a large and established congregation, for the reason that from various considerations it is a matter of pre-eminent importance in your case.

The last condition of your success as a new Society, I am to notice, is that of liberality and willingness in your benefactions for its support. From the

example which you have already set in this respect, I conclude that I may dismiss this point with a few words. I will remark that you must expect and be ready, in this early stage of your existence, while your numbers shall be small compared with your expenses, to evince a more than ordinary liberality—a liberality, indeed, which may be really named generosity. The Pioneers in almost all new movements, the Patrons and promoters of nearly every fresh enterprise, and especially where the end proposed is the securing of increased facilities for the spread of Christianity and the advancement of civilization, must carry open hands as well as earnest souls; but their's may be the enviable consciousness that, beside procuring rich fruits for themselves, they are breaking the soil and planting the seed which shall yield their most abundant harvests to the generations which, in long succession, shall follow after them, and which, thus benefitted, shall cherish in grateful remembrance and arise to call blessed their benefactors. Motives thus immediate and far-reaching, addressing themselves to you in behalf of ample liberality, need but be stated to be realized and to exert their rightful influence.

I have now spoken, but too imperfectly I am aware, of your history, of the demands for your existence, and of your duties, as a new Society. Here I leave the matter for your consideration and action, adding, in conclusion, that while I can but regard you with anxiety as standing upon the threshold of a decisive failure or a decisive success, as

having crossed the Rubicon beyond which shall be encountered a long defeat or enjoyed a long triumph, still is that anxiety relieved by a firm confidence, gathered from a survey of your present and prospective conditions, that a sure progress and final achievement of visible and invisible prosperity await you.

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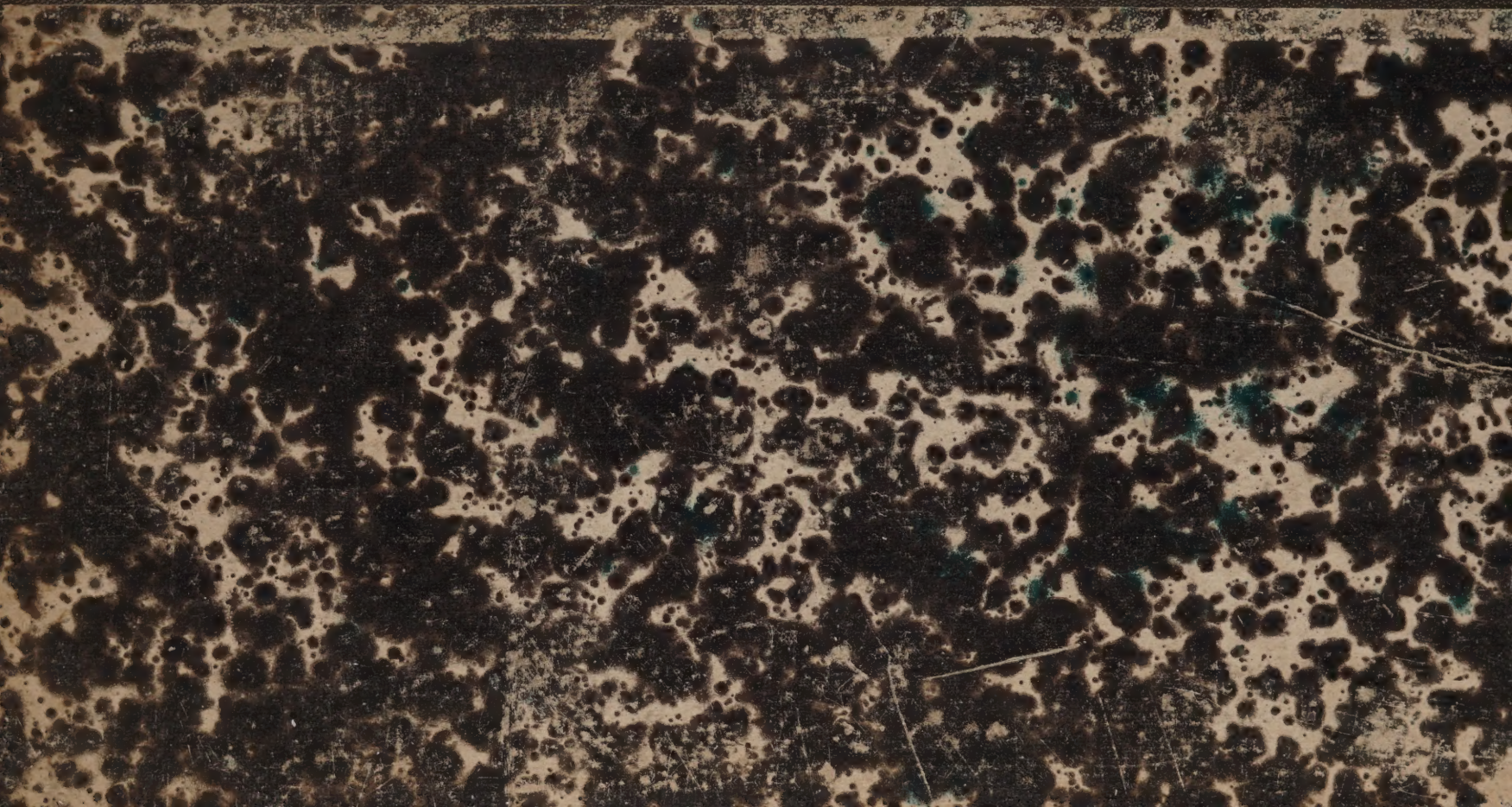
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